

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHGB #0371/01 0421702
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 111702Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6582
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL//CCJ2//
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 000371

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/10/2030
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: AYAD ALLAWI COMMENTS ON IRAQI POLITICAL
ENVIRONMENT AS CAMPAIGN SEASON NEARS

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Gary A. Grappo for Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Former Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi and a group of advisors met with POL M/C February 9 to discuss the Iraqi political environment and increased sectarian tensions in the run-up to national elections. Allawi acknowledged that the Cassation Chamber, in a shift from its February 3 ruling, intends to review all appeals from candidates disqualified on de-Ba'athification grounds before campaigning begins on February 12, but stressed that it remains unclear what evidence exists against barred candidates. He further highlighted what he views as an increased level of political violence and tension, as well as candidate assassinations. Allawi noted that neighboring states viewed with alarm the push for de-Ba'athification as evidence of rising sectarian sentiment in Iraq and encouraged U.S. officials to engage regional partners to calm such fears. End Summary.

De-Ba'athification Appeals

¶2. (C) Allawi said the Cassation Chamber would review the evidence against those candidates who had filed appeals against their disqualification by February 12. Candidates from Allawi's Iraqiyya coalition had 65 appeals pending, just behind the 68 appeals filed by member of the Coalition for Iraqi Unity (CIU), led by Interior Minister Bolani. Allawi stressed that it was unclear exactly what offenses barred candidates are accused of or what, if any, evidence exists against them. Former Iraqi Ambassador to the U.S. and Iraqiyya candidate for Baghdad, Rend al-Rahim commented that the "vague and elastic" accusations against individuals created a very difficult political environment. Using VP Tariq al-Hashimi as an example, she remarked that it was hard to defend oneself against charges of promoting Ba'athism, and noted that the burden of proof of innocence was on the individual.

Da'wa Engaging in Unfair Tactics

¶3. (C) Rahim voiced concern over the restrictive nature of the Independent High Electoral Commission's (IHEC's) recently published rules for media coverage. She asserted that PM Maliki's Da'wa party would undoubtedly use these media regulations to control the campaigning of competitors and go after electoral opponents. Allawi said Vice President Abd al-Mahdi had told him that the Iraqi National Alliance (INA) was equally concerned by campaign media restrictions. Iraqiyya MP Mayson Damluji believed Da'wa's strategy was to limit the exposure of political rivals by monopolizing media time slots and the use of the state-owned Iraqiyah news

outlet for campaigning. Accordingly, it would prove challenging for other political parties to educate their voters.

¶4. (C) Allawi further believed that protest marches held in Baghdad on February 8 bore the mark of Da'wa and the "Nationalist Trend." (Note: In response to the Cassation Chamber's ruling to defer adjudication of candidate disqualification appeals until after the election, anti-Ba'athist demonstrations took place in Baghdad, Najaf and Basrah on February 8. It is unclear whether the reference to Nationalist Trend was in fact a reference to the Sadrist Trend. End Note.) Elaborating, they explained that Maliki reportedly made a statement that day, interpreted as a call on the Iraqi people to react violently to any criticism of the GOI. (Note: An Allawi advisor present said that Maliki said something to the effect of "no one will dare take from our hands (presumably power), let alone will we give it over," and that this statement was being interpreted as a call for violent defense of the GOI. End Note.)

An Increasingly Tense Campaign Environment

¶5. (C) Damluji said there has been a marked increase in the level of sectarian tensions in recent weeks. She noted that Iraq's Sunni population felt very insecure; with Sahwa/Sons of Iraq groups now incorporated into the GOI, Sunnis believed there was no one to protect their rights and were thus thinking of taking up arms again. Damluji stressed the need for national consensus and strong leadership to counter this trend, as a move back toward sectarianism would be hard to

undo. Allawi lamented that the de-Ba'athification controversy had increased disenfranchisement and the level of suspicion in Iraq.

¶6. (C) Allawi expressed concern at rising violence and tension through out Iraq, which he said was particularly worrying in the run-up to the election. He commented that threats of assassinations over the last month in Baghdad had increased and that he had heard stories of Iraqiyya candidates or supporters being executed, noting the recent assassination of a female candidate from his party in Mosul. Allawi also said that one of his candidates in Diyala was arrested on February 8. (Note: Allawi provided no further information on the individual arrested. He remarked that a letter had been submitted to IHEC asking that his bloc be represented in the interrogation of the individual, although it is unclear what authority, if any, IHEC has in such a situation. End Note.)

¶7. (C) POL M/C stressed the importance of tracking cases of election-related assassinations, arrests, intimidation, harassment, and bribery of candidates from all parties and coalitions, as such information factors into the perceived and actual legitimacy of the election. Rahim commented that Allawi's party provided records of such incidents to the UN during the previous election. She acknowledged that similar data could be provided again, but requested that such information be put to constructive use and not merely serve a record-keeping purpose.

Neighboring Countries Concerned by de-Ba'athification

¶8. (C) Allawi said that on February 8 he received a phone call from Saudi Minister of Interior Prince Naif who expressed fear of what was transpiring in Iraq. Allawi noted that many regional leaders view the current de-Ba'athification effort as an attempt to stoke sectarianism, and suggested that U.S. ambassadors in the region reach out to the leadership in neighboring countries to address such concerns. Allawi asked that the Embassy inform him and other bloc leaders when issuing statements on

de-Ba'athification or the elections, such as Ambassador Hill's press statements on February 6, as many -- both internationally and in Iraq -- looked to the United States for insight into the stability of Iraq relative to the election. Allawi's delegation similarly voiced their belief that sectarian forces would work to stop the move toward secularism in Iraq, and stressed that U.S. assistance was needed to promote security prior to the national election and to engage regional partners.

¶9. (C) With regard to PM Maliki's openness to working with the Arab world, Rahim said that she sensed a noticeable level of hostility from the Da'wa party directed toward neighboring Arab states. She said Maliki's party privately regarded contact with the Arab world as dangerous and preferred to keep a distance from it, an approach which she viewed as damaging to Iraq's future in the region. Allawi further commented that Iraq is "not an island" and must be incorporated into the region.

¶10. (C) Comment: Allawi and his cohorts noted the negative impact of the de-Ba'athification controversy on what has become a tense electoral environment in Iraq, but it is unclear at this stage how it may affect Iraqiyya's prospects in the election. Some Iraqi contacts have suggested that the Q in the election. Some Iraqi contacts have suggested that the disqualifications may have worked to Allawi's benefit in ridding his coalition of those with strong Ba'athist ties (whether perceived or real) and thereby increasing his marketability as the next prime minister. It also appears that the de-Ba'athification campaign has galvanized Sunni and secular support for Iraqiyya. End Comment.
HILL